

# Goss Church, Columbia, hosts 20th annual Blessing of the Hunt

*By Tony Martin*

*Editor*

COLUMBIA, Miss. – Goss Baptist Church recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of its annual Blessing of the Hunt on Nov. 14, an event that has grown significantly since its inception in 2002.

Mark McArthur, who was pastor of Goss Baptist when the event began, now serves as associate missions strategist with the Tri-County Missions Association.

“Blessing of the Hunt goes way back beyond 20 years to 2002,” McArthur said. “And that particular year, we spent several nights in the emergency room, several hospitals that year with four or five people who have been injured in hunting accidents. And we also noticed about October a lot of the men disappeared from church and they were in search of that trophy buck. And so we began to pray, ‘Lord, how can we reach these folks? How can we minister to their needs?’”

“God put on our heart to do the Blessing of the Hunt. It’s a simple thing. We offer a few prizes, we have some vendors, and the most important thing is we share the Gospel. And that was our goal from the very beginning.”

## **Growing Attendance and Mission**

Under the leadership of Pastor Brian Malone, the ministry has continued to thrive and expand.

“We estimate we had 1,700 attending,” Malone said. “We give out programs, and everyone gets one. We have a number on each

one. We get an estimate based on how many programs are given out. We also have a couple of people who are hand counting as well as people walk through the door. Then there are a bunch of people that are working church folks, folks that don't get a program."

This year's featured speaker was Jay Lowder, founder and president of Jay Lowder Harvest Ministries, an organization focused on sharing the message of Jesus Christ. An avid hunter and dynamic speaker, Lowder has been featured on *ESPN Outdoors* for his hunting expertise.

Lowder shared four life lessons, drawing parallels between hunting and faith: one wrong decision can bring a life of regret; in the great outdoors, you must understand the decoys; you have to learn to follow the blood trail; and you have to make the right shot.

"There's a blood trail that goes back 2,000 years," Lowder said. "Jesus Christ was slaughtered like an animal. Why did he give up His life? Because He wanted you in His family."

### **Decisions for Christ**

During the invitation following Lowder's sermon, 201 attendees made decisions to accept Christ, and 124 rededicated their lives. Many shared prayer requests and decisions on provided cards.

"We're working on follow-up now," Malone said. "I have a team of ladies who are working on the requests. For those people who came from far away, we try to send those cards to churches around them because, obviously, people who live two-and-a-half hours away we won't be able to follow up on."

Luke 14 inspired the original Blessing of the Hunt in 2002. "We're thankful for what God has done through the Blessing of the Hunt," Malone said. "From the beginning, we determined that we were not going to charge for admission, we weren't

going to charge for food, we weren't going to charge for prizes. This would be the church reaching out, ministering to the needs of the community. And for 20 years, Goss Baptist Church has done just that."

### **Humble Beginnings, Significant Growth**

The first Blessing of the Hunt drew 150 attendees. By 2005, that number had grown to nearly 450, prompting the church to expand its Family Life Center. By 2012, even the expanded space was too small, leading to the use of a video feed in the sanctuary for overflow.

The event moved to the Columbia Expo Center and experienced its largest attendance in 2013, when Alan Robertson of *Duck Dynasty* fame was the speaker.

"There were people already lining up," McArthur recalled. "When the doors opened, the traffic had already backed up all the way up Highway 98. That was a four-mile backup. Someone called the fire chief, and they stopped people from entering at 4,800."

Robertson, who was initially stranded in Atlanta due to flight delays, arrived just 30 minutes before the event thanks to a last-minute private flight.



Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers prepare more than 1000 servings of red beans and rice during the Blessing of the Hunt on Nov. 14 at Goss Baptist Church, Columbia. (Photo credit: MSBDR Facebook)

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“Mississippi Baptist Disaster Relief feeding volunteers had the privilege of supporting Goss Baptist Church in their 20th anniversary of the Blessing of the Hunt,” said Hubert Yates, director of Disaster Relief for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. “This is an annual event that MSBDR has participated in for the last 12-plus years. We prepared a meal of red beans and rice for 1,000-1,200 attendees.”

### **Looking Ahead**

The next Blessing of the Hunt is scheduled for Nov. 13, 2025, with Hank Hough of Kingdom Dog Ministries as the featured speaker.